

On the type specimens of birds from Lifu, described by E. L. Layard in 1878

by G. F. Mees and C. T. Fisber

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E. L. (Edgar) Layard's (1878a) paper, published in May of that year, contains descriptions of 5 new taxa of birds from the island of Lifu, off the east coast of New Caledonia, namely: *Turdus Pritzbuerei*, *Pachycephala Littayei*, *Zosterops minuta*, *Zosterops inornata* and *Erythrura cyanofrons*. There is no mention of the collector, the date of collection or the number of specimens examined except in the case of *Turdus pritzbuerei*, where male, female and juvenile are described.

Two months later, the author published a more comprehensive paper on the avifauna of New Caledonia and Lifu, in collaboration with his son, Leopold (Layard & Layard 1878). Confusingly the Lifu birds, described in the first article by Edgar Layard alone, are described again with the indication "n.sp." but without any reference to the earlier publication. In this second paper the origin of the birds from Lifu is revealed:

"... several novelties . . . we have been fortunate enough to discover in an old collection belonging to the French colonial authorities, and destined for the Colonial Museum, now in the process of building. This collection was made, as the labels show, by two French gentlemen, M. Guillanton, Lieutenant d'infanterie de Marine, and M. Déplanche, in the island of Lifu, the central island of the Loyalty group . . . Unfortunately, exposure to dust, mites, and rats, in ill-fitting cases with broken panes of glass, has damaged most of the specimens beyond recovery, and the defective preparation of M. Guillanton's birds, both as to form and preservation, have especially marked them out for destruction. Still they afford a good foundation for a list of that island's birds, and the new species are so well marked that our wonder is they have escaped detection . . . the novelties have so fired the zeal of L.L. [Leopold], that he has started off on a collecting-expedition to the spot . . . On his return we may perhaps have some further information to communicate."

This rather long quotation is necessary in order to make it clear that the type specimens of the 5 new forms from Lifu were not collected by either of the Layards; nor were they ever in their possession. The issue was confused, however, by H. B. Tristram (1879), who acquired specimens from the Layards and remarked, under *Zosterops minuta* and *Z. inornata*, "We have at length received the types of these two species" and, under *Turdus pritzbuerei*, "The types of this new and interesting Thrush . . . are . . . now received".

This misleading information caused Gadow (1883: 199) also to list as types 2 specimens of *Pachycephala littayei* in the British Museum (Natural History), which were collected by Edgar Layard in August 1878, when he too made a collecting trip to Lifu (Layard 1878b). Bangs (1918) pointed out Gadow's error, speculating that the real type had been retained by Layard and might possibly now be in the South African Museum, as Layard had close ties with that institution.

When discussing Tristram's examples of *Zosterops* (formerly housed in Liverpool, following purchase from Tristram in 1896, but lost when this museum was bombed in 1941), Mees (1969) realised that the specimens of

Z. inornata could not possibly be types; they had been collected in August 1878, whilst the description had been published in May of that year. Furthermore, the last lines in the above quotation from Layard & Layard (1878) reveal that it was while Leopold Layard was away collecting in Lifu that his father prepared the type description. Consequently, the specimen of *Zosterops inornata* in the British Museum (Natural History), obtained during the course of this trip by Leopold Layard on 13 January 1878 and listed as a syntype by Warren & Harrison (1971: 258), has no type status. The same is the case with the specimen in the MacLeay Museum, Sydney, dated 9 January 1878, which Mees (1969) thought might possibly have been collected early enough to be a syntype. Regarding *Zosterops minuta*, Mees (1969: 123, 140) accepted that the Liverpool specimens had been the types because in Tristram's (1889) catalogue 2 of these birds are noted as having been collected by Edgar Layard in September 1877. It is now apparent that this was not the case, since Edgar did not visit Lifu until the following year and must presumably have obtained this material in September 1878.

Wagstaffe (1978: 19) listed a juvenile male of *Turdus poliocephalus pritzbuerei* as "Neotype: T5564. 11th January, 1878. Collected by E. L. Layard.". In fact C.T.F. later found that the collecting label had been written by Leopold (E.L.C.) Layard and that the collecting date was 10 January (Fisher 1981). Wagstaffe chose this particular bird as he thought there was "reasonable certainty that Layard had it before him when he described the species". On this basis, however, it would have been more appropriate to refer to the specimen as a lectotype. Neotypic status could have been conferred on any of the Layards' specimens and it would seem preferable to have selected a good adult male, such as the specimen collected on 23 August 1878 – one of the 2 selected wrongly as types by Tristram (1879) and indeed figured as such in that paper. Wagstaffe's action was contrary to advice received from his successor at Liverpool, Peter Morgan, who suggested (in a letter dated 12 August 1977), that the entry in the type list should run as follows:

"*Turdus pritzbuerei* Layard. Neotype . . . T.5550. [Male], Kepenche, Lifu . . . 23rd August 1878 . . . There is no trace of the material in the French Colonial Museum, referred to by Layard . . . Although [T.5564] was collected before the description was published there is no certainty that it was before Layard when he wrote his description. The specimen does not match exactly his description of the juvenile male, the Liverpool specimen having a great deal of continuous dark brown on the under side instead of being irregularly marked with broken bars of sepia . . . Conscious of the problems in selecting a neotype, I have selected that figured topotype which shows the characteristics of the subspecies and not the immature stage represented by the earlier taken juvenile male".

It should, however, be noted that, even had Wagstaffe followed this advice, such designation of a neotype would not have been in accord with rules laid down under the International Code of Zoological Nomenclature (1985, art. 75). His publication (1978) does not qualify as a "revisionary work", nor were there "exceptional circumstances" requiring the selection of a neotype for "solving a complex zoological problem". Consequently, we prefer to regard Wagstaffe's designation as invalid.

There is a total of 7 Layard specimens of *Turdus pritzbuerei* from the Tristram collection in the Liverpool Museum; 2 more were exchanged with the Leiden Museum in August 1879 and so do not appear in Tristram's printed

catalogue (1889). The Leiden 2 both lack original labels, these having been removed around the end of the century by the then curator at Leiden, O. Finsch, and replaced by his own hand-written labels. One of the specimens was collected on 4 September 1878 but the other, from Kepenche, is mis-dated 28 August 1876 and carries the additional notes "Typical specimen! '*M. pritzbueri*' original label written by Layard". From this it is evident that Finsch, a competent ornithologist, was aware of the value of the original label and it is therefore incomprehensible that he, nevertheless, removed and destroyed it. The copying error in the date on the label written by Finsch (1876 for 1878) is particularly serious, as it might easily have led to the conclusion that this specimen is a syntype. A third Layard specimen in Leiden, a female from Kepenche collected on 20 August 1878, was purchased from the dealer G. A. Frank of Amsterdam, in 1882.

Although the Layards left little room for optimism, it still appeared worth enquiring whether any of the type specimens from the old Colonial Museum might still survive. Information received from F. Hannecart is, unfortunately, not encouraging: the natural history museum in Noumea no longer exists and its collections have been dispersed. Part of the bird collection is entirely lost; another part – including specimens of *Zosterops* and *Pachycephala* from the Loyalty Islands – is in extremely poor condition due to inadequate conservation and insect damage. Amongst the extant birds, which are all mounted, no specimens of *Erythrura cyanofrons* or *Turdus pritzbueri* remain. If the remnant of this collection does include types it might still be of historical interest to try and salvage them, but the fact that the birds are mounted makes it unlikely that any labels survive to distinguish those with type status from material collected much later.

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A new subspecies of Greater Antillean Bullfinch *Loxigilla violacea* from the Caicos Islands with notes on other populations

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The Turks and Caicos Islands (Fig. 1) are small (up to c. 288 km², Middle Caicos), predominately scrub-covered British Crown islands at the south-eastern end of the Bahama archipelago. Specimens of the Greater Antillean Bullfinch *Loxigilla violacea* that I collected on the Caicos Bank during my 1970's surveys of southern Bahaman vertebrates are noticeably smaller than those taken elsewhere in the archipelago. Measurements (mm) of specimens I examined from throughout the range of *L. violacea* (Tables 1 & 2) include wing length (flattened against the ruler), tail length (base to tip of longest rectrix), total length (tip of bill to tip of tail and on freshly-dead specimens only), bill length (exposed culmen), bill width (between lore and nostril) and bill depth (at base of exposed culmen).

Endemic to the West Indies, *L. violacea* is known from the Bahamas (includ-



Figure 1.